The Time of the Singing of Birds



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Anderson's photographer, Rome. Emery Walker, Sc.

From Giotto's painting of "St. Francis and the Birds" at Assisi

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THE TIME
OF THE
SINGING OF BIRDS



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HENRY FROWDE
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FOR

M. O' M.

OUR thanks are due to those authors and publishers whose co-operation has enabled us to use for this collection a number of modern poems which bird-lovers would not willingly forgo. The poems by Mr. William Bowry, Mr. Robert Bridges, and Mr. Thomas Hardy are inserted with the kind permission of the authors. For the three by Mr. Swinburne we are indebted to the generosity of Mr. Watts-Dunton, and for those by Francis Thompson and the late Father Tabb to that of Messrs. Burns & Oates. We have also to thank Mr. William Rossetti and Ellis for their leave to include a poem by Dante Gabriel Rossetti; Messrs. Macmillan for poems by Charles Kingsley and Christina Rossetti; Messrs. Constable for those by Mr. George Meredith; Messrs. Ward, Lock & Co. for that by Henry Kingsley; Messrs. Scribner for one by George Santayana; Messrs. Chatto & Windus for two by George Macdonald; and the Walter Scott Publishing Co. for two by the late Mr. Eric Mackay.

M. A. P.
M. S.
G. M. F.

THE TIME OF THE SINGING OF BIRDS

Is it, as the Grecian sings,
Birds were made the first of things?

πάντα δὲ θνητοῖς ἐστὶν ἀφ᾽ ἡμῶν τῶν ὀρνίθων τὰ μέγιστα.
πρῶτα μὲν ὥρας φαίνομεν ἡμεῖς ἦρος, χειμῶνος ὀπώρας·
σπείρειν μέν, ὅταν γέρανος κρώζουσ᾽ ἐς τὴν Λιβύην μεταχωρῇ.

THE SEASONS

IN Spring-time when the leaves are young,
Clear dewdrops gleam like jewels, hung
On boughs the fair birds roost among.

When Summer comes with sweet unrest,
Birds weary of their mother's breast,
And look abroad and leave the nest.

In Autumn, ere the waters freeze,
The swallows fly across the seas:—
If we could fly away with these!

In Winter when the birds are gone,
The sun himself looks starved and wan,
And starved the snow he shines upon.

CHRISTINA ROSSETTI

SPRING

In the spring-time, the only pretty ring-time,
When birds do sing; hey-ding-a-ding-ding;
Sweet lovers love the spring.

SPRING'S WELCOME



HAT bird so sings, yet so does wail?
O 'tis the ravish'd nightingale.
Jug, jug, jug, jug, tereu! she cries,
And still her woes at midnight rise.
Brave prick-song! Who is't now we hear?
None but the lark so shrill and clear;
Now at heaven's gate she claps her wings,
The morn not waking till she sings.
Hark, hark, with what a pretty throat
Poor robin-redbreast tunes his note!
Hark how the jolly cuckoos sing
Cuckoo! to welcome in the spring!
Cuckoo! to welcome in the spring!

JOHN LYLY.



ENTEN ys come with love to toune,
With blosmen ant with briddes roune
That al this blisse bryngeth;
Dayes-eyes in this dales,
Notes suete of nyhtegales,
Vch foul song singeth.
The threstel coc him threteth oo,
A-way is huere wynter wo,
When woderove springeth;
This foules singeth ferly fele,
Ant wlyteth on huere winter wele
That al the wode ryngeth.

ANON.

roune] lay
woodruff

him threteth oo] chideth them ever

ferly fele] marvellous many

woderove]

wlyteth] whistle

AND on the smallë greenë twistis sat
The lytill suetë nyghtingale, and song
So loud and clere, the ympnis consecrat
Off lufis vse, now soft, now lowd among,
That all the gardyng and the wallis rong.
Right of thaire song, and on the copill next
Off thaire suete armony, and lo the text:

CANTUS

'Worschippë, ȝe that loueris bene, this may,
For of ȝour blisse the kalendis are begonne,
And sing with vs, away, winter, away!
Cum, somer, cum, the suete sesoun and sonne!
Awake for schame! that haue ȝour heuynnis wonne,
And amourously lift vp ȝour hedis all,
Thank lufe that list ȝou to his merci call.'

Quhen thai this song had song a lytill thrawe
Thai stent a quhile, and therewith vnaffraid
As I beheld and kest myn eyne a-lawe,
From beugh to beugh thay hippit and thai plaid,
And freschly in thaire birdis kynd arraid
Thaire fetheris new, and fret theme In the sonne,
And thankit lufe, that had thaire makis wonne.

This was the planë ditee of thaire note,
And there-with-all vnto my-self I thoght
'Quhat lyf is this, that makis birdis dote?
Quhat may this be, how cummyth It of ought?
Quhat nedith It to be so dere y-bought?
It is nothing, trowe I, bot feynit chere,
And that men list to counterfeten chere.'

KING JAMES I.

ympnis] hymn copill] couplet thrawe] while

ANSWER TO A CHILD'S QUESTION

DO you ask what the birds say? The sparrow, the dove,
The linnet and thrush say 'I love, and I love!'
In the winter they're silent, the wind is so strong;
What it says I don't know, but it sings a loud song.
But green leaves and blossoms, and sunny warm weather,
And singing and loving—all come back together.
The lark is so brimful of gladness and love,
The green fields below him, the blue sky above,
That he sings, and he sings, and forever sings he
'I love my love and my love loves me'.

SAMUEL TAYLOR COLERIDGE.

SOUND the flute!
Now 'tis mute;
Birds delight,
Day and night,
Nightingale,
In the dale,
Lark in sky—
Merrily
Merrily, merrily to welcome in the year.

Little boy
Full of joy;
Little girl
Sweet and small;
Cock does crow,
So do you;
Merry voice
Infant noise
Merrily, merrily, to welcome in the year.

Little lamb,
Here I am;
Come and lick
My white neck;
Let me pull
Your soft wool;
Let me kiss
Your soft face;
Merrily, merrily, we welcome in the year.

WILLIAM BLAKE.

AUBADE

THE lark now leaves his wat'ry nest,
And climbing shakes his dewy wings.
He takes this window for the East,
And to implore your light he sings—
Awake, awake! The morn will never rise
Till she can dress her beauty at your eyes.

The merchant bows unto the seaman's star,
The ploughman from the sun his season takes;
But still the lover wonders what they are
Who look for day before his mistress wakes.
Awake, awake! break thro' your veils of lawn!
Then draw your curtains, and begin the Dawn!

SIR WILLIAM DAVENANT.

SPRING

SPRING, the sweet Spring, is the year's pleasant king;
Then blooms each thing, then maids dance in a ring,
Cold doth not sting, the pretty birds do sing—
Cuckoo, jug-jug, pu-we, to-witta-woo!

The palm and may make country houses gay,
Lambs frisk and play, the shepherds pipe all day,
And we hear aye birds tune this merry lay—
Cuckoo, jug-jug, pu-we, to-witta-woo!

The fields breathe sweet, the daisies kiss our feet,
Young lovers meet, old wives a-sunning sit,
In every street these tunes our ears do greet—
Cuckoo, jug-jug, pu-we, to-witta-woo!
Spring, the sweet Spring!

THOMAS NASHE.

THE STARLINGS

EARLY in the spring-time, on raw and windy mornings,
Beneath the freezing house-eaves, I heard the starlings sing—
'Ah, dreary March month, is this then a time for building wearily?
Sad, sad to think that the year is but begun.'

Late in the autumn, on still and cloudless evenings,
Among the golden reed-beds I heard the starlings sing—
'Ah, that sweet March month, when we and our mates were courting,
Sad, sad to think that the year is all but done.'

CHARLES KINGSLEY.

THE LONELY MOUNTAIN

ONE bird, that ever with the wakening spring
Was wont to sing,
I wait, through all my woodlands, far and near,
In vain to hear.

The voice of many waters, silent long,
Breaks forth in song;
Young breezes to the listening leaves outpour
Their heavenly lore:

A thousand other wingèd warblers sweet,
Returning, greet
Their fellows, and rebuild upon my breast
The wonted nest.

But unto me one fond familiar strain
Comes not again—
A breath whose faintest echo, farthest heard,
A mountain stirred.

JOHN BANISTER TABB.

I HEARD a linnet courting
His lady in the spring:
His mates were idly sporting,
Nor stayed to hear him sing
His song of love.—
I fear my speech distorting
His tender love.

The phrases of his pleading
Were full of young delight;
And she that gave him heeding
Interpreted aright
His gay sweet notes,—
So sadly marred in the reading,—
His tender notes.

And when he ceased, the hearer
Awaited the refrain,
Till swiftly perching nearer
He sang his song again,
His pretty song:—
Would that my verse spake fitter
His tender song!

Ye happy, airy creatures!
That in the merry spring
Think not of what misfeatures
Or cares the year may bring;
But unto love
Resign your simple natures
To tender love.

ROBERT BRIDGES.

And the thrush sings sweet as an untaught bard
Whose voice is a flute, and whose heart a flame

THE THRUSH'S SONG



THOU whose face hath felt the Winter's wind,
Whose eye has seen the snow-clouds hung in mist
And the black elm-tops 'mong the freezing stars!
To thee the spring will be a harvest time.
O thou whose only book has been the light
Of supreme darkness, which thou feddest on
Night after night, when Phoebus was away!
To thee the Spring shall be a triple morn.
O fret not after knowledge. I have none,
And yet my song comes native with the warmth.
O fret not after knowledge! I have none,
And yet the evening listens. He who saddens
At thought of idleness cannot be idle,
And he's awake who thinks himself asleep.

JOHN KEATS.

A ROBIN

FLAME-throated robin on the topmost bough
Of the leafless oak, what singest thou?
Hark! he telleth how—
'Spring is coming now; Spring is coming now.

Now ruddy are the elm-tops against the blue sky,
The pale larch donneth her jewelry;
Red fir and black fir sigh,
And I am lamenting the year gone by.

The bushes where I nested are all cut down,
They are felling the tall trees one by one,
And my mate is dead and gone,
In the winter she died and left me lone.

She lay in the thicket where I fear to go;
For when the March-winds after the snow
The leaves away did blow,
She was not there, and my heart is woe:

And sad is my song when I begin to sing,
As I sit in the sunshine this merry spring:
Like a withered leaf I cling
To the white oak-bough, while the wood doth ring

Spring is coming now, the sun again is gay;
Each day like a last spring's happy day.'—
Thus sang he; then from his spray
He saw me listening and flew away.

ROBERT BRIDGES.

HOME THOUGHTS FROM ABROAD



H, to be in England
Now that April's there,
And whoever wakes in England
Sees, some morning, unaware,
That the lowest boughs and the brushwood sheaf
Round the elm-tree bole are in tiny leaf,
While the chaffinch sings on the orchard bough
In England—now!

And after April, when May follows,
And the whitethroat builds, and all the swallows!
Hark, where my blossomed pear-tree in the hedge
Leans to the field and scatters on the clover
Blossoms and dewdrops—at the bent spray's edge—
That 's the wise thrush; he sings each song twice over,
Lest you should think he never could recapture
The first fine careless rapture!
And though the fields look rough with hoary dew,
All will be gay when noontide wakes anew
The buttercups, the little children's dower
—Far brighter than this gaudy melon-flower!

ROBERT BROWNING.

SPRING AND WINTER

WHEN daisies pied and violets blue,
And lady-smocks all silver-white,
And cuckoo-buds of yellow hue
Do paint the meadows with delight,
The cuckoo then, on every tree,
Mocks married men; for thus sings he,
Cuckoo!
Cuckoo, cuckoo!—O word of fear,
Unpleasing to a married ear!

When shepherds pipe on oaten straws,
And merry larks are ploughmen's clocks,
When turtles tread, and rooks, and daws,
And maidens bleach their summer smocks,
The cuckoo then, on every tree,
Mocks married men; for thus sings he,
Cuckoo!
Cuckoo, cuckoo!—O word of fear,
Unpleasing to a married ear!

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE.

PACK, CLOUDS, AWAY!



ACK, clouds, away! and welcome, day!
With night we banish sorrow.
Sweet air, blow soft; mount, lark, aloft
To give my Love good-morrow!
Wings from the wind to please her mind,
Notes from the lark I'll borrow:
Bird, prune thy wing! nightingale, sing!
To give my Love good-morrow!
To give my Love good-morrow
Notes from them all I'll borrow.

Wake from thy nest, robin red-breast!
Sing, birds, in every furrow!
And from each bill let music shrill
Give my fair Love good-morrow!
Blackbird and thrush in every bush
Stare, linnet, and cock-sparrow,
You pretty elves, among yourselves
Sing my fair Love good-morrow!
To give my Love good-morrow
Sing, birds, in every furrow!

THOMAS HEYWOOD.

PHILOMELA

THE Nightingale, as soon as April bringeth
Unto her rested sense a perfect waking,
While late-bare Earth, proud of new clothing, springeth,
Sings out her woes, a thorn her song-book making;
And mournfully bewailing,
Her throat in tunes expresseth
What grief her breast oppresseth,
For Tereus' force on her chaste will prevailing.

O Philomela fair, O take some gladness
That here is juster cause of plaintful sadness!
Thine earth now springs, mine fadeth;
Thy thorn without, my thorn my heart invadeth.

Alas! she hath no other cause of anguish
But Tereus' love, on her by strong hand wroken,
Wherein she suffering, all her spirits languish,
Full woman-like complains her will was broken.
But I, who, daily craving,
Cannot have to content me,
Have more cause to lament me,
Since wanting is more woe than too much having.

O Philomela fair, O take some gladness
That here is juster cause of plaintful sadness!
Thine earth now springs, mine fadeth;
Thy thorn without, my thorn my heart invadeth.

SIR PHILIP SIDNEY.

TO THE CUCKOO



BLITHE New-comer! I have heard,
I hear thee and rejoice:
O Cuckoo! shall I call thee Bird
Or but a wandering Voice?

While I am lying on the grass
Thy two-fold shout I hear;
From hill to hill it seems to pass,
At once far off, and near.

Though babbling only to the Vale
Of sunshine and of flowers,
Thou bringest unto me a tale
Of visionary hours.

Thrice welcome, darling of the Spring!
Even yet thou art to me
No bird, but an invisible thing,
A voice, a mystery.

The same whom in my school-boy days
I listened to; that Cry
That made me look a thousand ways
In bush, and tree, and sky.

To seek thee did I often rove
Through woods and on the green;
And thou wert still a hope, a love;
Still longed for, never seen!

And I can listen to thee yet;
Can lie upon the plain
And listen, till I do beget
That golden time again.

O blessèd Bird! the earth we pace
Again appears to be
An unsubstantial, faery place,
That is fit home for Thee.

WILLIAM WORDSWORTH.

LULLABY

THE rook's nest do rock on the tree-top
Where vew foes can stand;
The martin's is high, an' is deep
In the steep cliff o' zand.
But thou, love, a-sleepèn where vootsteps
Mid come to thy bed,
Hast father an' mother to watch thee
An' shelter thy head.
Lullaby, Lilybrow. Lie asleep;
Blest be thy rest.

An' zome birds do keep under ruffèn
Their young vrom the storm,
An' zome wi' nest-hoodèns o' moss
An' o' wool, do lie warm.
An' we wull look well to the house ruf
That o'er thee mid leäk,
An' the blast that mid beät on thy winder
Shall not smite thy cheäk.
Lullaby, Lilybrow. Lie asleep;
Blest be thy rest.

WILLIAM BARNES.

TO THE NIGHTINGALE

SWEET bird, that sing'st away the early hours
Of winters past or coming void of care,
Well pleasèd with delights which present are,
Fair seasons, budding sprays, sweet-smelling flowers;
To rocks, to springs, to rills, from leafy bowers
Thou thy Creator's goodness dost declare,
And what dear gifts on thee He did not spare,
A stain to human sense in sin that lowers.
What soul can be so sick which by thy songs,
Attir'd in sweetness, sweetly is not driven
Quite to forget earth's turmoils, spites, and wrongs,
And lift a reverent eye and thought to heaven?
Sweet artless songster, thou my mind dost raise
To airs of spheres, yes and to angels' lays.

DRUMMOND OF HAWTHORNDEN.

THE SKYLARK

HOW the blithe Lark runs up the golden stair
That leans through cloudy gates from Heaven to Earth,
And all alone in the empyreal air
Fills it with jubilant sweet songs of mirth;
How far he seems, how far
With the light upon his wings,
Is it a bird, or star
That shines, and sings?

What matter if the days be dark and frore,
That sunbeam tells of other days to be,
And singing in the light that floods him o'er
In joy he overtakes Futurity;
Under cloud-arches vast
He peeps, and sees behind
Great Summer coming fast,
Adown the wind!

And now he dives into a rainbow's rivers,
In streams of gold and purple he is drowned,
Shrilly the arrows of his song he shivers
As tho' the stormy drops were turned to sound;
And now he issues thro',
He scales a cloudy tower,
Faintly, like falling dew,
His vast notes shower.

Let every wind be hushed, that I may hear
The wondrous things he tells the World below,
Things that we dream of he is watching near,
Hopes that we never dreamed he would bestow;
Alas! the storm hath rolled
Back the gold gates again,
Or surely he had told
All Heaven to men!

So the victorious Poet sings alone,
And fills with light his solitary home,
And thro' that glory sees new worlds foreshown,
And hears high songs, and triumphs yet to come;
He waves the air of Time
With thrills of golden chords,
And makes the world to climb
On linkèd words.

What if his hair be grey, his eyes be dim,
If wealth forsake him, and if friends be cold,
Wonder unbars her thousand gates to him,
Truth never fails, nor Beauty waxes old;
More than he tells his eyes
Behold, his spirit hears,
Of grief, and joy, and sighs
'Twixt joy and tears.

Blest is the man who with the sound of song
Can charm away the heartache, and forget
The frost of Penury, and the stings of Wrong,
And drown the fatal whisper of Regret!
Darker are the abodes
Of kings, tho' his be poor,
While Fancies, like the Gods,
Pass through his door.

Singing thou scalest Heaven upon thy wings,
Thou liftest a glad heart into the skies;
He maketh his own sunrise, while he sings,
And turns the dusty Earth to Paradise;
I see thee sail along
Far up the sunny streams,
Unseen, I hear his song,
I see his dreams.

FREDERICK TENNYSON.

TO A REDBREAST

IN SICKNESS

STAY, little cheerful Robin! stay,
And at my casement sing,
Though it should prove a farewell lay,
And this our parting spring.

Though I, alas! may ne'er enjoy
The promise in thy song;
A charm, *that* thought can not destroy,
Doth to thy strain belong.

Methinks that in my dying hour
Thy song would still be dear,
And with a more than earthly power
My passing Spirit cheer.

Then, little Bird, this boon confer,
Come, and my requiem sing,
Nor fail to be the harbinger
Of everlasting Spring.

WILLIAM WORDSWORTH.

Upspring the airy larks, shrill-voiced and loud
And breathe their mattins from a morning cloud

TO A SKYLARK



P with me! up with me into the clouds!
For thy song, Lark, is strong;
Up with me up with me into the clouds!
Singing, singing,
With clouds and sky about thee ringing,
Lift me, guide me till I find
That spot which seems so to thy mind!

I have walked through wildernesses dreary,
And to-day my heart is weary;
Had I now the wings of a Faery
Up to thee would I fly.
There is madness about thee, and joy divine
In that song of thine;
Lift me, guide me high and high
To thy banqueting-place in the sky.

Joyous as morning
Thou art laughing and scorning;
Thou hast a nest for thy love and thy rest,
And, though little troubled with sloth,
Drunken Lark! thou would'st be loth
To be such a traveller as I.
Happy, happy Liver,
With a soul as strong as a mountain river
Pouring out praise to the almighty Giver,
Joy and jollity be with us both!

Alas! my journey, rugged and uneven,
Through prickly moors or dusty ways must wind
But hearing thee, or others of thy kind,
As full of gladness and as free of heaven,
I, with my fate contented, will plod on,
And hope for higher raptures, when life's day is done.

WILLIAM WORDSWORTH.

THE WINDOW

AY

BE merry, all birds, to-day,
Be merry on earth as you never were merry before,
Be merry in heaven, O larks, and far away,
And merry for ever and ever, and one day more.
Why?
For it 's easy to find a rhyme.
Look, look, how he flits,
The fire-crowned king of the wrens, from out of the pine!
Look how they tumble the blossom, the mad little tits!
'Cuck-oo! Cuck-oo!' was ever a May so fine?
Why?
For it 's easy to find a rhyme.
O merry the linnet and dove,
And swallow and sparrow and throstle, and have your desire!
O merry my heart, you have gotten the wings of love,
And flit like the king of the wrens with a crown of fire.
Why?
For it 's ay, ay, ay, ay.

ALFRED TENNYSON.

PHILOMEL

AS it fell upon a day
In the merry month of May,
Sitting in a pleasant shade
Which a grove of myrtles made,
Beasts did leap and birds did sing,
Trees did grow and plants did spring;
Everything did banish moan
Save the Nightingale alone:
She, poor bird, as all forlorn
Lean'd her breast up-till a thorn,
And there sung the dolefull'st ditty,
That to hear it was great pity.
Fie, fie, fie! now would she cry;
Tereu, Tereu! by and by;
That to hear her so complain
Scarce I could from tears refrain;
For her griefs so lively shown
Made me think upon mine own.
Ah! thought I, thou mourn'st in vain,
None takes pity on thy pain:
Senseless trees they cannot hear thee,
Ruthless beasts they will not cheer thee:
King Pandion he is dead,
All thy friends are lapp'd in lead;
All thy fellow birds do sing
Careless of thy sorrowing:
Even so, poor bird, like thee,
None alive will pity me.

RICHARD BARNEFIELD.

TO THE NIGHTINGALE

O NIGHTINGALE, that on yon bloomy spray
Warblest at eve, when all the woods are still,
Thou with fresh hope the lover's heart dost fill,
While the jolly Hours lead on propitious May.
Thy liquid notes that close the eye of day,
First heard before the shallow cuckoo's bill,
Portend success in love; O if Jove's will
Have link'd that amorous power to thy soft lay,
Now timely sing, ere the rude bird of hate
Foretell my hopeless doom in some grove nigh;
As thou from year to year hast sung too late
For my relief, yet hadst no reason why:
Whether the Muse, or Love call thee his mate,
Both them I serve, and of their train am I.

JOHN MILTON.

At Shelley's birth The lark, dawn-spirit, with an anthem loud
Rose from the dusky earth To tell it to the cloud

TO A SKYLARK

HAIL to thee, blithe spirit!
Bird thou never wert,
That from heaven, or near it,
Pourest thy full heart
In profuse strains of unpremeditated art.

Higher still and higher
From the earth thou springest,
Like a cloud of fire;
The blue deep thou wingest,
And singing still dost soar, and soaring ever singest.

In the golden lightning
Of the sunken sun,
O'er which clouds are brightening,
Thou dost float and run,
Like an unbodied joy whose race is just begun.

The pale purple even
Melts around thy flight;
Like a star of heaven,
In the broad daylight
Thou art unseen, but yet I hear thy shrill delight—

Keen as are the arrows
Of that silver sphere,
Whose intense lamp narrows
In the white dawn clear,
Until we hardly see, we feel that it is there.

All the earth and air
With thy voice is loud,
As, when night is bare,
From one lonely cloud
The moon rains out her beams, and heaven is overflowed.

What thou art we know not;
What is most like thee?
From rainbow clouds there flow not
Drops so bright to see,
As from thy presence showers a rain of melody :—

Like a poet hidden
In the light of thought,
Singing hymns unbidden,
Till the world is wrought
To sympathy with hopes and fears it heeded not :

Like a high-born maiden
In a palace tower,
Soothing her love-laden
Soul in secret hour
With music sweet as love, which overflows her bower :

Like a glowworm golden
In a dell of dew,
Scattering unbeholden
Its aërial hue
Among the flowers and grass that screen it from the view :

Like a rose embowered
In its own green leaves,
By warm winds deflowered,
Till the scent it gives
Makes faint with too much sweet these heavy-wingèd thieves.

Sound of vernal showers
On the twinkling grass,
Rain-awakened flowers—
All that ever was
Joyous and clear and fresh—thy music doth surpass.

Teach us, sprite or bird,
What fair thoughts are thine:
I have never heard
Praise of love or wine
That panted forth a flood of rapture so divine.

Chorus hymeneal,
Or triumphal chant,
Matched with thine would be all
But an empty vaunt,
A thing wherein we feel there is some hidden want.

What objects are the fountains
Of thy happy strain?
What fields or waves or mountains?
What shapes of sky or plain?
What love of thine own kind? what ignorance of pain?

With thy clear keen joyance
Languor cannot be:
Shadow of annoyance
Never came near thee:
Thou lovest, but ne'er knew love's sad satiety.

Waking or asleep,
Thou of death must deem
Things more true and deep
Than we mortals dream,
Or how could thy notes flow in such a crystal stream?

We look before and after,
And pine for what is not:
Our sincerest laughter
With some pain is fraught;
Our sweetest songs are those that tell of saddest thought.

Yet, if we could scorn
  Hate and pride and fear,
If we were things born
  Not to shed a tear,
I know not how thy joy we ever should come near.

Better than all measures
  Of delightful sound,
Better than all treasures
  That in books are found,
Thy skill to poet were, thou scorner of the ground!

Teach me half the gladness
  That thy brain must know,
Such harmonious madness
  From my lips would flow,
The world should listen then, as I am listening now.

PERCY BYSSHE SHELLEY.

TO A SKYLARK



THEREAL minstrel! pilgrim of the sky!
Dost thou despise the earth where cares abound?
Or, while the wings aspire, are heart and eye
Both with thy nest upon the dewy ground?
Thy nest which thou canst drop into at will,
Those quivering wings composed, that music still!

To the last point of vision and beyond,
Mount, daring warbler. That love-prompted strain,
'Twixt thee and thine a never-failing bond,
Thrills not the less the bosom of the plain.
Yet might'st thou seem, proud privilege, to sing
All independent of the leafy spring.

Leave to the nightingale her shady wood;
A privacy of glorious light is thine;
Whence thou dost pour upon the world a flood
Of harmony, with instinct more divine;
Type of the wise who soar, but never roam;
True to the kindred points of Heaven and Home!

WILLIAM WORDSWORTH.

TO THE CUCKOO

HAIL, beauteous stranger of the grove!
Thou messenger of Spring!
Now Heaven repairs thy rural seat,
And woods thy welcome ring.

What time the daisy decks the green,
Thy certain voice we hear:
Hast thou a star to guide thy path,
Or mark the rolling year?

Delightful visitant! with thee
I hail the time of flowers,
And hear the sound of music sweet
From birds among the bowers.

The schoolboy, wand'ring through the wood
To pull the primrose gay,
Starts, the new voice of Spring to hear,
And imitates thy lay.

What time the pea puts on the bloom,
Thou fli'st thy vocal vale,
An annual guest in other lands,
Another Spring to hail.

Sweet bird! thy bower is ever green,
Thy sky is ever clear;
Thou hast no sorrow in thy song,
No Winter in thy year!

O could I fly, I'd fly with thee!
We'd make, with joyful wing,
Our annual visit o'er the globe,
Companions of the Spring.

JOHN LOGAN.

THE GREEN LINNET

BENEATH these fruit-tree boughs that shed
Their snow-white blossoms on my head,
With brightest sunshine round me spread
Of Spring's unclouded weather,
In this sequestered nook how sweet
To sit upon my orchard-seat!
And birds and flowers once more to greet,
My last year's friends together.

One have I marked, the happiest guest
In all this covert of the blest:
Hail to Thee, far above the rest
In joy of voice and pinion!
Thou Linnet! in thy green array,
Presiding Spirit here to-day,
Dost lead the revels of the May;
And this is thy dominion.

While birds, and butterflies, and flowers,
Make all one band of paramours,
Thou, ranging up and down the bowers,
Art sole in thy employment;
A Life, a Presence like the Air,
Scattering thy gladness without care,
Too blest with any one to pair;
Thyself thy own enjoyment.

Amid yon tuft of hazel trees
That twinkle to the gusty breeze,
Behold him perched in ecstacies,
    Yet seeming still to hover;
There, where the flutter of his wings,
Upon his back and body flings
Shadows and sunny glimmerings
    That cover him all over.

My dazzled sight he oft deceives,
A Brother of the dancing leaves;
Then flits, and from the cottage-eaves
    Pours forth his song in gushes;
As if by that exulting strain
He mocked and treated with disdain
The voiceless Form he chose to feign,
    While fluttering in the bushes.

WILLIAM WORDSWORTH.

NIGHTINGALES

BEAUTIFUL must be the mountains whence ye come,
And bright in the fruitful valleys the streams, wherefrom
Ye learn your song:
Where are those starry woods? O might I wander there,
Among the flowers, which in that heavenly air
Bloom the year long!

Nay, barren are those mountains and spent the streams:
Our song is the voice of desire, that haunts our dreams,
A throe of the heart,
Whose pining visions dim, forbidden hopes profound,
No dying cadence nor long sigh can sound,
For all our art.

Alone, aloud in the raptured ear of men
We pour our dark nocturnal secret; and then,
As night is withdrawn
From these sweet-springing meads and bursting boughs of May,
Dream, while the innumerable choir of day
Welcome the dawn.

ROBERT BRIDGES.

HER supple breast thrills out
Sharp airs, and staggers in a warbling doubt
Of dallying sweetness, hovers o'er her skill,
And folds in wavèd notes, with a trembling bill,
The pliant series of her slippery song;
Then starts she suddenly into a throng
Of short thick sobs, whose thundering volleys float
And roll themselves over her lubric throat
In panting murmurs, 'stilled out of her breast,
That ever-bubbling spring, the sugared nest
Of her delicious soul, that there does lie
Bathing in streams of liquid melody;
In that sweet soil it seems a holy quire
Founded to the name of great Apollo's lyre;
Whose silver roof rings with the sprightly notes
Of sweet-lipped angel-imps, that swill their throats
In cream of morning Helicon, and then
Prefer soft anthems to the ears of men,
To woo them from their beds, still murmuring
That men can sleep while they their matins sing:—
Most divine service! whose so early lay
Prevents the eyelids of the blushing day.

RICHARD CRASHAW.

A clamorous cuckoo stoops to meet her hand

TO THE CUCKOO

NOT the whole warbling grove, in concert heard
When sunshine follows shower, the breast can thrill
Like the first summons, Cuckoo ! of thy bill,
With its twin notes inseparably paired.
The captive 'mid damp vaults unsunned, unaired,
Measuring the periods of his lonely doom,
That cry can reach ; and to the sick man's room
Sends gladness, by no languid smile declared.
The lordly eagle race through hostile search
May perish ; time may come when never more
The wilderness shall hear the lion roar ;
But, long as cock shall crow from household perch
To rouse the dawn, soft gales shall speed thy wing,
And thy erratic voice be faithful to the Spring !

WILLIAM WORDSWORTH.

THE WINDOW

SPRING

BIRDS' love and birds' song
Flying here and there,
Birds' song and birds' love,
And you with gold for hair!
Birds' song and birds' love
Passing with the weather,
Men's song and men's love,
To love once and for ever.

Men's love and birds' love,
And women's love and men's!
And you my wren with a crown of gold,
You my queen of the wrens!
You the queen of the wrens—
We'll be birds of a feather,
I'll be king of the queen of the wrens,
And all in a nest together.

ALFRED TENNYSON.

For Mirth of May with skippës and with hops
The birdës sang upon the tender crops

HARK! how the merry minstrels of the grove
Devote the day to melody and love;
The ouzel shrill, that haunts the thorny dale,
The merry thrush, the love-lorn nightingale;
Their little breasts with emulation swell,
And sweetly strive in singing to excel.
In the thick forests feeds the cooing dove;
The starling whistles various notes of love:
The sparrow chirps, the clefted walls among;
To the sweet wildness of the linnet's song,
To the harsh cuckoo, and the twittering quail
Resounds the wood, the river, and the vale;
And tender twigs, all trembling on the trees,
Dance to the murmuring musick of the bees.
Upspring the airy larks, shrill-voic'd and loud,
And breathe their mattins from a morning cloud,
To great glad Nature, and the God of day,
And flowery Venus, blooming queen of May;
The songs of praise their tuneful breasts employ,
Charm every ear, and wrap the soul in joy.
Thus sung the sweet musicians on the spray;
Welcome thou Lord of Light, and Lamp of Day;
. . . . . .
Welcome to birds that build upon the breere,
Welcome great Lord and Ruler of the year.

GAVIN DOUGLAS.

ODE TO A NIGHTINGALE

I

MY heart aches, and a drowsy numbness pains
My sense, as though of hemlock I had drunk,
Or emptied some dull opiate to the drains
One minute past, and Lethe-wards had sunk:
'Tis not through envy of thy happy lot,
But being too happy in thy happiness—
That thou light-wingèd Dryad of the trees,
In some melodious plot
Of beechen green and shadows numberless,
Singest of summer in full-throated ease.

II

O, for a draught of vintage! that hath been
Cooled a long age in the deep-delvèd earth,
Tasting of Flora and the country green,
Dance and Provençal song and sunburnt mirth!
O for a beaker full of the warm South,
Full of the true, the blushful Hippocrene,
With beaded bubbles winking at the brim,
And purple-stainèd mouth;
That I might drink, and leave the world unseen,
And with thee fade away into the forest dim;

III

Fade far away, dissolve, and quite forget
What thou among the leaves hast never known,
The weariness, the fever, and the fret,
Here, where men sit and hear each other groan;
Where palsy shakes a few, sad, last grey hairs,
Where youth grows pale, and spectre-thin and dies;
Where but to think is to be full of sorrow
And leaden-eyed despairs,
Where Beauty cannot keep her lustrous eyes,
Or new Love pine at them beyond to-morrow.

IV

Away! away! for I will fly to thee,
Not charioted by Bacchus and his pards,
But on the viewless wings of Poesy,
Though the dull brain perplexes and retards:
Already with thee! tender is the night,
And haply the Queen-Moon is on her throne,
Clustered around by all her starry Fays;
But here there is no light,
Save what from heaven is with the breezes blown
Through verdurous glooms and winding mossy ways.

V

I cannot see what flowers are at my feet,
Nor what soft incense hangs upon the boughs,
But in embalmed darkness, guess each sweet
Wherewith the seasonable month endows
The grass, the thicket, and the fruit-tree wild;
White hawthorn, and the pastoral eglantine;
Fast fading violets covered up in leaves;
And mid-May's eldest child,
The coming musk-rose, full of dewy wine,
The murmurous haunt of flies on summer eves.

VI

Darkling I listen; and, for many a time
I have been half in love with easeful Death,
Called him soft names in many a mused rhyme,
To take into the air my quiet breath;
Now more than ever seems it rich to die,
To cease upon the midnight with no pain,
While thou art pouring forth thy soul abroad
In such an ecstasy!
Still wouldst thou sing, and I have ears in vain—
To thy high requiem become a sod

VII

Thou wast not born for death, immortal Bird!
No hungry generations tread thee down;
The voice I hear this passing night was heard
In ancient days by emperor and clown:
Perhaps the self-same song that found a path
Through the sad heart of Ruth, when, sick for home,
She stood in tears amid the alien corn;
The same that oft-times hath
Charmed magic casements, opening on the foam
Of perilous seas, in faery lands forlorn.

VIII

Forlorn! the very word is like a bell
To toll me back from thee to my sole self!
Adieu! the fancy cannot cheat so well
As she is famed to do, deceiving elf.
Adieu! adieu! thy plaintive anthem fades
Past the near meadows, over the still stream,
Up the hill-side; and now 'tis buried deep
In the next valley-glades:
Was it a vision, or a waking dream?
Fled is that music:—Do I wake or sleep?

JOHN KEATS.

HAD I WIST

'Sing me the song that ripples round and round.'

HAD I wist, quoth spring to the swallow,
That earth could forget me, kissed
By summer, and lured to follow
Down ways that I know not, I,
My heart should have waxed not high:
Mid-March would have seen me die,
Had I wist.

Had I wist, Oh spring, said the swallow,
That hope was a sunlit mist
And the faint light heart of it hollow,
Thy woods had not heard me sing,
Thy winds had not known my wing;
It had faltered ere thine did, spring,
Had I wist.

ALGERNON CHARLES SWINBURNE.

SUMMER

Under the greenwood tree
Who loves to lie with me,
And tune his merry note
Unto the sweet bird's throat,
Come hither, come hither, come hither!

SUMER is icumen in,
Lhude sing cuccu!
Groweth sed, and bloweth med,
And springth the wude nu,
Sing cuccu!

Awe bleteth after lomb,
Lhouth after calve cu;
Bulluc sterteth, bucke verteth,
Murie sing cucu!

Cuccu, cuccu, well singes thu, cuccu;
Ne swike thu naver nu;
Sing cuccu, nu, sing cuccu,
Sing cuccu, sing cuccu, nu!

ANON.

Lhouth] loweth sterteth] leapeth swike] cease



N an arbour,
Late as I were,
The fowls to hear
Was mine intent;
Singing in fere
With notës clear,
They made good cheer
On boughës bent,
Their tunës sweet
Moved me to sleep,
Further to fleet
I could not restrain;
To take my rest
I thought it best,
It was my lust
Still to remain.

THOMAS FEILDE.

MAGDALEN at Michael's gate,
Tirlèd at the pin;
On Joseph's thorn sang the blackbird,
'Let her in! Let her in!'

'Hast thou seen the wounds?' said Michael,
'Know'st thou thy sin?'
'It is evening, evening,' sang the blackbird,
'Let her in! Let her in!'

'Yes, I have seen the wounds,
And I know my sin.'
'She knows it well, well, well,' sang the blackbird,
'Let her in! Let her in!'

'Thou bringest no offerings,' said Michael,
'Nought save sin.'
And the blackbird sang 'She is sorry, sorry, sorry,
Let her in! Let her in!'

When he had sung himself to sleep,
And night did begin,
One came and opened Michael's gate,
And Magdalen went in.

HENRY KINGSLEY.

Never sweeter noise was heard by living man
Than made this merry gentle nightingale

THE Nightingale whose happy noble heart
No dole can daunt, nor fearful force affright;
Whose cheerful voice doth comfort saddest wight,
When she herself hath little cause to sing;
Whom lovers love because she plains their griefs,
She wrays their woes and yet relieves their pain;
Whom worthy minds always esteemèd much,
And gravest years have not disdained her notes.

GEORGE GASCOIGNE.

ITYLUS

SWALLOW, my sister, Oh sister swallow,
How can thine heart be full of the spring?
A thousand summers are over and dead.
What hast thou found in the spring to follow?
What hast thou found in thine heart to sing?
What wilt thou do when the summer is shed?

Oh swallow, sister, Oh fair swift swallow,
Why wilt thou fly after spring to the south,
The soft south whither thine heart is set?
Shall not the grief of the old time follow?
Shall not the song thereof cleave to thy mouth?
Hast thou forgotten ere I forget?

Sister, my sister, Oh fleet sweet swallow,
Thy way is long to the sun and the south;
But I, fulfilled of my heart's desire,
Shedding my song upon height, upon hollow,
From tawny body and sweet small mouth
Feed the heart of the night with fire.

I the nightingale all spring through,
Oh swallow, sister, Oh changing swallow,
All spring through till the spring be done,
Clothed with the light of the night on the dew,
Sing, while the hours and the wild birds follow,
Take flight and follow and find the sun.

Sister, my sister, Oh soft light swallow,
Though all things feast in the spring's guest-chamber,
How hast thou heart to be glad thereof yet?
For where thou fliest I shall not follow,
Till life forget and death remember,
Till thou remember and I forget.

Swallow, my sister, Oh singing swallow,
I know not how thou hast heart to sing.
Hast thou the heart? is it all past over?
Thy lord the summer is good to follow,
And fair the feet of thy lover the spring:
But what wilt thou say to the spring thy lover?

Oh swallow, sister, Oh fleeting swallow,
My heart in me is a molten ember,
And over my head the waves have met.
But thou wouldst tarry or I would follow,
Could I forget or thou remember,
Couldst thou remember and I forget.

Oh sweet stray sister, Oh shifting swallow,
The heart's division divideth us.
Thy heart is light as a leaf of a tree;
But mine goes forth among sea-gulfs hollow,
To the place of the slaying of Itylus,
The feast of Daulis, the Thracian sea.

Oh swallow sister, Oh rapid swallow,
I pray thee sing not a little space.
Are not the roofs and the lintels wet?
The woven web that was plain to follow,
The small slain body, the flower-like face,
Can I remember if thou forget?

Oh sister, sister, thy first-begotten!
The hands that cling and the feet that follow,
The voice of the child's blood crying yet
Who hath remembered me? Who hath forgotten?
Thou hast forgotten, Oh summer swallow,
But the world shall end when I forget.

ALGERNON CHARLES SWINBURNE.

THE WREN

A LOVELY morning, still, so very still
It hardly seems a growing day of spring
Though all the odorous buds are blossoming
And the small matins birds were glad and shrill
Some hours ago; but now the woodland rill
Murmurs along, the only vocal thing
Save when the wee wren flits with stealthy wing
And cons by fits and bits her evening trill.

HARTLEY COLERIDGE.

IN GRANTCHESTER MEADOWS

On First Hearing a Skylark Sing

TOO late, thou tender songster of the sky,
Trilling unseen, by things unseen inspired,
I list thy far-heard cry
That poets oft to kindred song hath fired,
As floating through the purple veils of air
Thy soul is poured on high,
A little joy in an immense despair.

Too late thou biddest me escape the earth,
In ignorance of wrong
To spin a little slender thread of song;
On yet unwearied wing
To rise and soar and sing,
Not knowing death or birth
Or any true unhappy human thing.

To dwell 'twixt field and cloud,
By river-willow and the murmurous sedge,
Be thy sweet privilege,
To thee and to thy happy lords allowed.
My native valley higher mountains hedge,
'Neath starlit skies and proud,
And sadder music in my soul is loud.

Yet have I loved thy voice,
Frail echo of some ancient sacred joy.
Ah, who might not rejoice
Here to have wandered, a fair English boy,
And breathed with life thy rapture and thy rest
Where woven meadow-grasses fold thy nest?
But whose life is his choice?
And he who chooseth not hath chosen best.

George Santayana.

PHILOMELA

HARK! ah, the nightingale!
The tawny-throated!
Hark! from that moonlit cedar what a burst!
What triumph! hark—what pain!

O Wanderer from a Grecian shore,
Still, after many years, in distant lands,
Still nourishing in thy bewilder'd brain
That wild, unquench'd, deep-sunken, old-world pain—
Say, will it never heal?
And can this fragrant lawn
With its cool trees, and night,
And the sweet, tranquil Thames,
And moonshine, and the dew,
To thy rack'd heart and brain
Afford no balm?

Dost thou to-night behold
Here, through the moonlight on this English grass,
The unfriendly palace in the Thracian wild?
Dost thou again peruse
With hot cheeks and sear'd eyes
The too clear web, and thy dumb sister's shame?
Dost thou once more assay
Thy flight, and feel come over thee,
Poor Fugitive, the feathery change
Once more, and once more seem to make resound
With love and hate, triumph and agony,
Lone Daulis, and the high Cephissian vale?
Listen, Eugenia—
How thick the bursts come crowding through the leaves!
Again—thou hearest!
Eternal passion!
Eternal pain!

MATTHEW ARNOLD.

ECSTASY

I CANNOT sing to thee as I would sing
If I were quickened like the holy lark
With fire from Heaven and sunlight on his wing,
Who wakes the world with witcheries of the dark
Renewed in rapture in the reddening air.
A thing of splendour do I deem him then,
A feather'd frenzy with an angel's throat,
A something sweet that somewhere seems to float
'Twixt earth and sky, to be a sign to men.
He fills me with such wonder and despair!
I long to kiss thy locks, so golden bright,
As he doth kiss the tresses of the sun.
Oh! bid me sing to thee, my chosen one,
And do thou teach me, Love, to sing aright!

ERIC MACKAY.

SONG

I HAD a dove and the sweet dove died;
And I have thought it died of grieving:
O, what could it grieve for? Its feet were tied,
With a silken thread of my own hand's weaving;
Sweet little red feet! why should you die—
Why should you leave me, sweet bird! why?
You liv'd alone in the forest-tree,
Why, pretty thing! would you not live with me?
I kiss'd you oft and gave you white peas;
Why not live sweetly, as in the green trees?

JOHN KEATS.

PHILOMEL

LO, as a minstrel at the court of Love,
The nightingale, who knows his mate is nigh,
Thrills into rapture; and the stars above
Look down, affrighted, as they would reply.
There is contagion, and I know not why,
In all this clamour, all this fierce delight,
As if the sunset, when the day did swoon,
Had drawn some wild confession from the moon.
Have wrongs been done? Have crimes enacted been
To shame the weird retirement of the night?
O clamorous bird! O sad, sweet nightingale!
Withhold thy voice, and blame not Beauty's queen.
She may be pure, though dumb: and she is pale,
And wears a radiance on her brow serene.

ERIC MACKAY.

THE LARK ASCENDING

HE rises and begins to round,
He drops the silver chain of sound,
Of many links without a break,
In chirrup, whistle, slur and shake,
All intervolved and spreading wide,
Like water-dimples down a tide
Where ripple ripple overcurls
And eddy into eddy whirls;
A press of hurried notes that run
So fleet they scarce are more than one,
Yet changeingly the trills repeat
And linger ringing while they fleet,
Sweet to the quick o' the ear, and dear
To her beyond the handmaid ear,
Who sits beside our inner springs,
Too often dry for this he brings,
Which seems the very jet of earth
At sight of sun, her music's mirth,
As up he wings the spiral stair,
A song of light, and pierces air
With fountain ardour, fountain play,
To reach the shining tops of day,
And drink in everything discerned
An ecstasy to music turned,
Impelled by what his happy bill
Disperses; drinking, showering still,
Unthinking save that he may give
His voice the outlet, there to live
Renewed in endless notes of glee,
So thirsty of his voice is he,
For all to hear and all to know
That he is joy, awake, aglow,
The tumult of the heart to hear
Through pureness filtered crystal-clear,
And know the pleasure sprinkled bright
By simple singing of delight,

Shrill, irreflective, unrestrained,
Rapt, ringing, on the jet sustained
Without a break, without a fall,
Sweet silvery, sheer lyrical,
Perennial, quavering up the chord
Like myriad dews of sunny sward
That trembling into fullness shine,
And sparkle dropping argentine;
Such wooing as the ear receives
From zephyr caught in choric leaves
Of aspens when their chattering net
Is flushed to white with shivers wet;
And such the water-spirit's chime
On mountain heights in morning's prime,
Too freshly sweet to seem excess,
Too animate to need a stress;
But wider over many heads
The starry voice ascending spreads,
Awakening, as it waxes thin,
The best in us to him akin;
And every face to watch him raised,
Puts on the light of children praised,
So rich our human pleasure ripes
When sweetness on sincereness pipes,
Though naught be promised from the seas,
But only a soft-ruffling breeze
Sweep glittering on a still content,
Serenity in ravishment.

For singing till his heaven fills,
'Tis love of earth that he instils,
And ever winging up and up,
Our valley is his golden cup,
And he the wine which overflows
To lift us with him as he goes:
The woods and brooks, the sheep and kine,
He is, the hills, the human line,
The meadows green, the fallows brown,
The dreams of labour in the town;

He sings the sap, the quickened veins ;
The wedding song of sun and rains
He is, the dance of children, thanks
Of sowers, shout of primrose-banks,
And eye of violets while they breathe ;
All these the circling song will wreathe,
And you shall hear the herb and tree,
The better heart of men shall see,
Shall feel celestially, as long
As you crave nothing save the song.
Was never voice of ours could say
Our inmost in the sweetest way,
Like yonder voice aloft, and link
All hearers in the song they drink.
Our wisdom speaks from failing blood,
Our passion is too full in flood,
We want the key of his wild note
Of truthful in a tuneful throat,
The song seraphically free
Of taint of personality,
So pure that it salutes the suns
The voice of one for millions,
In whom the millions rejoice
For giving their one spirit voice.

Yet men have we, whom we revere,
Now names, and men still housing here,
Whose lives, by many a battle-dint
Defaced, and grinding wheels on flint,
Yield substance, though they sing not, sweet
For song our highest heaven to greet :
Whom heavenly singing gives us new,
Enspheres them brilliant in our blue,
From firmest base to farthest leap,
Because their love of Earth is deep,
And they are warriors in accord
With life to serve, and pass reward,
So touching purest and so heard
In the brain's reflex of yon bird :

Wherefore their soul in me, or mine,
Through self-forgetfulness divine,
In them, that song aloft maintains,
To fill the sky and thrill the plains
With showerings drawn from human stores,
As he to silence nearer soars,
Extends the world at wings and dome,
More spacious making more our home,
Till lost on his aërial rings
In light, and then the fancy sings.

GEORGE MEREDITH.

MY love is strengthen'd, though more weak in seeming;
I love not less, though less the show appear:
That love is merchandiz'd, whose rich esteeming
The owner's tongue doth publish everywhere.
Our love was new, and then but in the spring,
When I was wont to greet it with my lays;
As Philomel in summer's front doth sing,
And stops her pipe in growth of riper days:
Not that the summer is less pleasant now
Than when her mournful hymns did hush the night,
But that wild music burthens every bough,
And sweets grown common lose their dear delight.
Therefore like her, I sometime hold my tongue,
Because I would not dull you with my song.

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE.

WHAT THE BIRDS SING

DOST thou understand,
Child, what the birds are singing?

All the land
Knows that: the water tells it to the rushes
Aloud, and lower and softlier to the sand:
The flower-fays, lip to lip and hand to hand,
Laugh and repeat it all till darkness hushes
Their singing with a word that falls and crushes
All song to silence down the river-strand
And where the hawthorns hearken for the thrushes.
And all the secret sense is sweet and wise
That sings through all their singing, and replies
When we would know if heaven be gay or grey
And would not open all too soon our eyes
To look perchance on no such happy skies
As sleep brings close and waking blows away.

ALGERNON CHARLES SWINBURNE.



UHA wald haif tyrt to heir that tune,
Quhilk birds corroborate ay abune,
With lays of luvesome larks
Quhilk clim sae high in chrystal skies,
Quhyle Cupid walkens with the crys
Of Nature's chappel clerks ?

ALEXANDER MONTGOMERY.

THE LARK



E rose, and singing passed from sight—
A shadow kindling with the sun,
His joy ecstatic flamed, till light
And heavenly song were one.

JOHN BANISTER TABB.

O NIGHTINGALE! thou surely art
A creature of a 'fiery heart':—
These notes of thine—they pierce and pierce;
Tumultuous harmony and fierce!
Thou sing'st as if the God of wine
Had helped thee to a Valentine;
A song in mockery and despite
Of shades, and dews, and silent night;
And steady bliss, and all the loves
Now sleeping in these peaceful groves.

I heard a Stock-dove sing or say
His homely tale this very day;
His voice was buried among trees,
Yet to be come at by the breeze:
He did not cease; but cooed, and cooed;
And somewhat pensively he wooed:
He sang of love, with quiet blending,
Slow to begin, and never ending;
Of serious faith, and inward glee;
That was the song—the song for me!

WILLIAM WORDSWORTH.

Call my darling up with round and roguish challenge;
Quaintest, richest carol of all the singing throats!

THE MESSAGE

YE little birds that sit and sing
Amidst the shady valleys,
And see how Phillis sweetly walks
Within her garden-alleys:
Go, pretty birds, about her bower;
Sing, pretty birds, she may not lower:
Ah me! methinks I see her frown!
Ye pretty wantons, warble.

Go tell her through your chirping bills,
As you by me are bidden,
To her is only known my love,
Which from the world is hidden.
Go, pretty birds, and tell her so.
See that your notes strain not too low,
For still methinks I see her frown!
Ye pretty wantons, warble.

Go tune your voices' harmony,
And sing, I am her lover;
Strain loud and sweet, that every note
With sweet content may move her:
And she that hath the sweetest voice,
Tell her I will not change my choice:
Yet still methinks I see her frown!
Ye pretty wantons, warble.

O fly! make haste! see, see, she falls
Into a pretty slumber,
Sing round about her rosy bed
That waking she may wonder:
Say to her, 'tis her lover true
That sendeth love to you, to you!
And when you hear her kind reply,
Return with pleasant warblings.

THOMAS HEYWOOD.

LOW-flying swallow, tho' the sky be fair,
The sunshine soft,
Thou seekest not with love the upper air,
Soaring aloft;
Thy sharp and gleamy wing goes flashing by me
Thy dusky white and blue thou'lt not deny me!

Thy nest 's a bit of mine—thy little home
Set in the eaves.
When roses leave the wall, where wilt thou roam,
When summer leaves?
Not lightly, flying friend, can I forego thee,
The longest day is all too short to know thee!

MARY COLERIDGE.

DOVES

A HUNDRED wings are dropt as soft as one;
Now ye are lighted—lovely to my sight
The fearful circle of your gentle flight,
Rapid and mute, and drawing homeward soon:
And then the sober chiding of your tone,
As ye sit there from your own roofs arraigning
My trespass on your haunts, so boldly done,
Sounds like a solemn and a just complaining!
O happy, happy race! for though there clings
A feeble fear about your timid clan,
Yet ye are blest! with not a thought that brings
Disquietude, while proud and sorrowing man,
And eagle, weary of his mighty wings,
With anxious inquest fills his little span.

CHARLES TENNYSON-TURNER.

ADDRESS TO THE WOODLARK



STAY, sweet warbling woodlark, stay,
Nor quit me for the trembling spray:
A hapless lover courts thy lay,
Thy soothing, fond complaining.

Again, again that tender part,
That I may catch thy melting art;
For surely that wad touch her heart
Wha kills me wi disdaining.

Say was thy little mate unkind,
And heard thee as the careless wind?
O, nocht but love and sorrow joined,
Sic notes o' woe could wauken.

Thou tells o' never-ending care,
O' speechless grief, and dark despair;
For pity's sake sweet bird, nae mair!
Or my poor heart is broken!

ROBERT BURNS.

THE ASSUMPTION

BEHOLD! the mother bird
The Fledgeling's voice hath heard,
He calls anew,
'It was thy breast
That warmed the nest
From whence I flew.
Upon a loftier tree
Of life I wait for thee;
Rise, mother-dove, and come,
Thy Fledgeling calls thee home!'

JOHN BANISTER TABB.

AUTUMN

WHERE are the songs of spring, ay where are they?
Think not of them. Thou hast thy music too.

Thou shalt hear
Distant harvest-carols clear;
Rustle of the reapèd corn,
Sweet birds antheming the morn.

A straggling crow called high and thin. A bird
Trilled from the birch leaves

THE birds that sing on autumn eves
Among the golden-tinted leaves,
Are but the few that true remain
Of budding May's rejoicing train.

Like autumn flowers that brave the frost,
And make their show when hope is lost,
These 'mong the fruits and mellow scent
Mourn not the high-sunned summer spent.

Their notes thro' all the jocund spring
Were mixed in merry musicking:
They sang for love the whole day long,
But now their love is all for song.

Now each hath perfected his lay
To praise the year that hastes away:
They sit on boughs apart, and vie
In single songs and rich reply:

And oft as in the copse I hear
These anthems of the dying year,
The passions, once her peace that stole,
With flattering love my heart console.

ROBERT BRIDGES.

SUNSET WINGS

TO-NIGHT this sunset spreads two golden wings
Cleaving the western sky;
Winged too with wind it is, and winnowings
Of birds; as if the day's last hour in rings
Of strenuous flight must die.

Sun-steeped in fire, the homeward pinions sway
Above the dovecote-tops;
And clouds of starlings, ere they rest with day,
Sink, clamourous like mill-waters, at wild play,
By turns in every copse:

Each tree heart-deep the wrangling rout receives,—
Save for the whirr within,
You could not tell the starlings from the leaves;
Then one great puff of wings, and the swarm heaves
Away with all its din.

Even thus Hope's hours, in ever-eddying flight,
To many a refuge tend;
With the first light she laughed, and the last light
Glows round her still; who natheless in the night
At length must make an end.

And now the mustering rooks innumerable
Together sail and soar,
While for the day's death, like a tolling knell,
Unto the heart they seem to cry, Farewell,
No more, farewell, no more!

Is Hope not plumed, as 'twere a fiery dart?
And oh! thou dying day,
Even as thou goest must she too depart,
And Sorrow fold such pinions on the heart
As will not fly away?

DANTE GABRIEL ROSSETTI.

LARKS

WHAT voice of gladness, hark!
In heaven is ringing?
From the sad fields the lark
Is upward winging.

High through the mournful mist that blots our day
Their songs betray them soaring in the grey.
See them! Nay, they
In sunlight swim; above the furthest stain
Of cloud attain; their hearts in music rain
Upon the plain.

Sweet birds, far out of sight
Your songs of pleasure
Dome us with joy as bright
As heaven's best azure.

ROBERT BRIDGES.

BARTIMEUS TO THE BIRD

HAD I no revelation but thy voice—
No word but thine—
Still would my soul in certitude rejoice
That love divine
Thy heart, his hidden instrument, employs,
To waken mine.

JOHN BANISTER TABB.

ROBIN REDBREAST

GOOD-BYE, good-bye to summer!
For summer's nearly done;
The garden smiling faintly,
Cool breezes in the sun;
Our thrushes now are silent,
Our swallows flown away—
But Robin 's here in coat of brown,
And scarlet breast-knot gay.
Robin, Robin Redbreast,
O Robin dear!
Robin sings so sweetly
In the falling of the year.

Bright yellow, red and orange,
The leaves come down in hosts;
The trees are Indian princes,
But soon they'll turn to ghosts;
The leathery pears and apples
Hang russet on the bough;
It 's autumn, autumn, autumn late,
'Twill soon be winter now.
Robin, Robin Redbreast,
O Robin dear!
And what will this poor Robin do?
For pinching days are near.

The fire-side for the cricket,
The wheat-stack for the mouse,
When trembling night-winds whistle
And moan all round the house.
The frosty ways like iron,
The branches plumed with snow,—
Alas! in winter dead and dark
Where can poor Robin go?
Robin, Robin Redbreast,
O Robin dear!
And a crumb of bread for Robin,
His little heart to cheer.

WILLIAM ALLINGHAM.

TO THE REDBREAST

UNHEARD in the summer's flaring ray,
Pour forth thy notes, sweet singer,
Wooing the stillness of the autumn day;
Bid it a moment linger,
Nor fly
Too soon from winter's scowling eye.

The blackbird's song at even-tide,
And hers, who gay ascends,
Filling the heavens far and wide,
Are sweet. But none so blends,
As thine,
With calm decay, and peace divine.

GEORGE CORNISH.

WE saw the swallows gathering in the sky,
And in the osier-isle we heard them noise.
We had not to look back on summer joys,
Or forward to a summer of bright dye:
But in the largeness of the evening earth
Our spirits grew as we went side by side.
The hour became her husband and my bride.
Love that had robbed us so, thus blessed our dearth!
The pilgrims of the year waxed very loud
In multitudinous chatterings, as the flood
Full brown came from the West, and like pale blood
Expanded to the upper crimson cloud.
Love that had robbed us of immortal things,
This little moment mercifully gave,
Where I have seen across the twilight wave
The swan sail with her young beneath her wings.

GEORGE MEREDITH.

OCTOBER

BEHOLD, the fleeting swallow
Forsakes the frosty air;
And leaves, alert to follow,
Are falling everywhere,
Like wounded birds, too weak
A distant clime to seek.

And soon with silent pinions
The fledglings of the North
From winter's wild dominions
Shall drift, affrighted, forth,
And, phantom-like anon
Pursue the phantoms gone.

JOHN BANISTER TABB.

THE GARDEN

AND whan I was therin, y-wis
Myn herte was ful glad of this,
For well wende I ful sikerly
Have been in paradys erthely
So fair it was, that trusteth wel,
It seemed a place espirituel.
For certes as at my devys
Ther is no place in paradys
So good in for to dwelle or be
As in that gardin thoughte me;
For there was many a brid singing,
Throughout the yerde al thringing,
In many places were nightingales,
Alpes, finches and wodewales,
That in her swete song delyten
In thilke place as they habyten.
Ther mighte men see many flokkes
Of turtles and of laverokkes,
Chalaundres fele saw I there,
That wery, nigh forsongen were.
And thrustles, terins and mavys,
That songen for to win hem prys,
And eek to sormounte in hir song
These other briddes hem among.
By note made fair servyse,
These briddes, that I you devyse;
They songe hir song as fair and wel
As angels doon espirituel.
And trusteth wel, whan I hem herde,
Full lustily and wel I ferde:
For never yet swich melodye
Was herd of men that mighte dye.

GEOFFREY CHAUCER.

alpes] bulfinches wodewales] witwals?

WITHOUT Thy aid, without Thy gladsome beams,
The tribes of woodland warblers wou'd remain
Mute on the bending branches, nor recite
The praise of Him, who, e'er he formed their lord,
Their voices tun'd to transport, wing'd their flight,
And bade them call for nurture, and receive;
And lo! they call; the blackbird and the thrush,
The woodlark and the redbreast jointly call;
He hears and feeds their feather'd families,
He feeds his sweet musicians,—nor neglects
Th' invoking ravens in the greenwood wide;
And tho' their throats coarse ruttling hurt the ear,
They mean it all for musick; thanks and praise
They mean, and leave ingratitude to man.

CHRISTOPHER SMART.

THE SPARROW



LORD, I cannot but believe
The birds do sing Thy praises when they sing to one another;
And they are but lying fallow when the winter makes them grieve,
They but gather things for the summer to unsmother.

If thou hadst finished me, O Lord,
Not left out a part in me of the gift that goes to singing,
Then I had known the meaning of the Birds' song-word,
Should know upon what thoughts they their pearly talk were stringing.

I then should read the wisdom hid
In the storm-inspirèd song of thy thrush's bosom solemn;
And I should understand what thy free spirit did,
To make the lark-soprano mount like geyser-column.

I think I almost understand
Thy owl, his muffled swiftness, moon-round eyes and intoned hooting,
I think I could myself be a night owl in the land,
With notes of yellow moon, day dreamers all confuting.

But among Thy creatures that do sing,
I of them all am likest to the housetop-haunting sparrow,
That flies short flights on a dumpy, fluttering wing,
And chirps thy praises from a throat that's very short and narrow.

But if thy sparrow praise thee well
By singing well thy song, nor letting noisy traffic quell it,
It may be that in some high, leafy, heavenly dell
He may wake with a trumpet throat and a trumpet song to swell it.

GEORGE MACDONALD.

Or change their perch on a beat of quivering wings
From branch to branch only restful to pipe and peck

MISCONCEPTIONS

THIS is a spray the Bird clung to,
Making it blossom with pleasure,
Ere the high tree-top she sprung to,
Fit for her nest and her treasure.
Oh what a hope beyond measure
Was the poor spray's, which the flying feet hung to,—
So to be singled out, built in, and sung to!

This is a heart the Queen leant on,
Thrilled in a minute erratic,
Ere the true bosom she bent on,
Meet for love's regal dalmatic.
Oh, what a fancy ecstatic
Was the poor heart's, ere the wanderer went on—
Love to be saved for it, proffered to, spent on!

ROBERT BROWNING.

PROUD Maisie is in the wood
Walking so early;
Sweet Robin sits on the bush
Singing so rarely.

'Tell me, thou bonny bird,
When shall I marry me?'
'When six braw gentlemen
Kirkward shall carry ye.'

'Who makes the bridal bed?
Birdie, say truly?'
'The grey-headed sexton
That delves the grave duly.

'The glow-worm o'er grave and stone
Shall light thee steady;
The owl from the steeple sing
Welcome, proud lady.'

SIR WALTER SCOTT.



SWALLOW, Swallow, flying, flying South,
Fly to her, and fall upon her gilded eaves,
And tell her, tell her, what I tell to thee.

O tell her, Swallow, thou that knowest each,
That bright and fierce and fickle is the South,
And dark and true and tender is the North.

O Swallow, Swallow, if I could follow, and light
Upon her lattice, I would pipe and trill,
And cheep and twitter twenty million loves.

O were I thou that she might take me in,
And lay me on her bosom, and her heart
Would rock the snowy cradle till I died.

Why lingereth she to clothe her heart with love,
Delaying as the tender ash delays
To clothe herself, when all the woods are green?

O tell her, Swallow, that thy brood is flown:
Say to her, I do but wanton in the South,
But in the North long since my nest is made.

O tell her, brief is life but love is long,
And brief the sun of summer in the North,
And brief the moon of beauty in the South.

O Swallow, flying from the golden woods,
Fly to her, and pipe, and woo her, and make her mine,
And tell her, tell her, that I follow thee.

ALFRED TENNYSON.

THE BIRD

HITHER thou com'st. The busie wind all night
Blew through thy lodging, where thy own warm wing
Thy pillow was. Many a sullen storm,
For which coarse man seems much the fitter born,
Rain'd on thy bed
And harmless head;

And now as fresh and chearful as the light
Thy little heart in early hymns doth sing
Unto that *Providence*, whose unseen arm
Curb'd them, and cloath'd thee well and warm.
All things that be praise Him; and had
Their lesson taught them when first made.

So hills and valleys into singing break;
And though poor stones have neither speech nor tongue,
While active winds and streams both run and speak,
Yet stones are deep in admiration.
Thus Praise and Prayer here beneath the sun
Make lesser mornings, when the great are done.

For each inclosed spirit is a star
  Inlightning his own little sphaëre,
Whose light, though fetcht and borrowed from far,
  Both mornings makes and evenings there.

But as these birds of light make a land glad,
  Chirping their solemn matins on each tree :
  So in the shades of night some dark fowls be,
Whose heavy notes make all that hear them sad.

  The turtle then in palm-trees mourns,
    While owls and satyrs howl ;
  The pleasant land to brimstone turns,
    And all her streams grow foul.

Brightness and mirth, and love and faith, all flye,
Till the day-spring breaks forth again from high.

HENRY VAUGHAN.

CONSIDER THE RAVENS

LORD, according to Thy Words,
I have considered Thy birds;
And I find their life good
And better the better understood.
Sowing neither corn nor wheat
They have all that they can eat;
Reaping no more than they sow
They have all they can stow;
Having neither barn nor store,
Hungry again, they eat more.

Considering, I see too that they
Have a busy life—and plenty of play!
In the earth they dig their bills deep,
And work well though they do not heap;
Then to play in the air they are not loath,
And their nests between are better than both.

But this is when there blow no storms;
When berries are plenty in winter, and worms,
When their feathers are thick, and oil is enough
To keep the cold out and the rain off.
If there should come a long hard frost
Then it looks as Thy birds were lost.

But I consider further and find,
A hungry bird has a free mind.
He is hungry to-day, not to-morrow,
Steals no comfort, no grief doth borrow;
This moment is his, Thy will hath said it,
The next is nothing till Thou hast made it.

Thy bird has pain but has no fear,
Which is the worst of any gear;
When cold and hunger and harm betide him
He gathers them not to stuff inside him;

Content with the day's ill he has got
He waits just—nor haggles with his lot;
Neither jumbles God's Will
With driblets from his own still.

But next I see in my endeavour,
Thy birds here do not live for ever;
That cold or hunger, sickness or age,
Finishes their earthly stage.
The rook drops without a stroke,
And never gives another croak!
Birds lie here and birds lie there
With little feathers all astare,
And in Thy own sermon, Thou
That the sparrow falls dost allow.

It shall not cause me any alarm,
For neither so comes the bird to harm,
Seeing Our Father, Thou hast said,
Is by the sparrow's dying bed—
Therefore it is a blessèd place,
And the sparrow in high grace.

It cometh therefore to this, Lord—
I have considered Thy Word
And henceforth will be Thy bird.

GEORGE MACDONALD.



OME back to me my swallow
And leave me not forlorn,
Into the woods I follow
The footsteps of the morn.
I thread the rustling hollow
Before the day is born,
Come back to me my swallow,
And leave me not forlorn!

The light was dark without thee,
My bird of April days,
I almost came to doubt thee
When thou hadst gone thy ways—
The sunshine round about thee—
Into the land of rays.
The light was dark without thee,
My bird of April days.

MARY COLERIDGE.

WINTER

Where are the merry birds? Away, away
On panting wings thro' the inclement skies.

The sedge is withered by the lake
And no birds sing.

WINTER



HEN icicles hang by the wall,
And Dick the shepherd blows his nail,
And Tom bears logs into the hall,
And milk comes frozen home in pail,
When blood is nipp'd, and ways be foul;
Then nightly sings the staring owl,
Tuwhit!
Tuwhoo!—A merry note,
While greasy Joan doth keel the pot.

When all around the wind doth blow,
And coughing drowns the parson's saw,
And birds sit brooding in the snow,
And Marian's nose looks red and raw,
When roasted crabs hiss in the bowl,
Then nightly sings the staring owl,
Tuwhit!
Tuwhoo! A merry note,
While greasy Joan doth keel the pot.

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE.

TO thorny thickets flock'd the feather'd throng,
And pensive plied their melancholy song,
Or to the shelter of the forest driven,
Escaped the windy turbulence of Heaven.

. . . . . .

In boding note, within her darksome bow'r,
Where crawling ivy clasps yon antient tow'r,
I heard the solitary owl complain,
Saddening dread midnight with her hideous strain;
While clam'rous wild-geese in long trains on high,
With lazy pinions fann'd the liquid sky.

. . . . . .

Then jackdaws chatter'd on the chimney high,
And cranes renewed their voyage thro' the sky:
Whose piercing clamors sounded in my ear,
Presage of wintry winds and tempests gath'ring near
Perch'd on a tree that nigh my chamber grew,
The kite began her lamentable pew.

GAVIN DOUGLAS.

TO THE OWL

SAD bird of night, what sorrows call thee forth,
To vent thy plaints thus in the midnight hour?
Is it some blast that gathers in the north,
Threatening to nip the verdure of thy bower?

Is it, sad owl, that Autumn strips the shade,
And leaves thee here, unsheltered and forlorn?
Or fear that Winter will thy nest invade?
Or friendless melancholy bids thee mourn?

Shut out lone bird from all the feathered train,
To tell thy sorrows to the unheeding gloom;
No friend to pity when thou dost complain,
Grief all thy thought, and solitude thy home.

Sing on, sad mourner! I will bless thy strain,
And pleased in sorrow listen to thy song:
Sing on, sad mourner! to the night complain,
While the lone echo wafts thy notes along.

Is beauty less, when down the glowing cheek
Sad piteous tears in native sorrows fall?
Less kind the heart when anguish bids it break?
Less happy he who lists to pity's call?

Ah no, sad Owl! nor is thy voice less sweet,
That sadness tunes it, and that grief is there;
That Spring's gay notes, unskilled, thou canst repeat;
That sorrow bids thee to the gloom repair.

Nor that the treble songsters of the day
Are quite estranged, sad bird of night! from thee;
Nor that the thrush deserts the evening spray,
When darkness calls thee from thy reverie.

From some old tower, thy melancholy dome,
While the grey walls and desert solitudes
Return each note, responsive to the gloom
Of ivied coverts and surrounding woods—

There hooting, I will list more pleased to thee
Than ever lover to the nightingale;
Or drooping wretch, oppressed with misery,
Lending his ear to some condoling tale.

ROBERT BURNS.

THE PETREL



WANDERER o'er the sea-graves evergreen,
Whereon the foam-flowers blossom day by day,
Thou flittest as a doomful shadow grey
That from the wave no sundering light can wean.
What wouldst thou from the deep unfathomed glean,
Frail voyager? and whither leads thy way?
Or art thou, as the sailor legends say,
An exile from the spirit-world unseen?

Lo! desolate, above a colder tide,
Pale Memory, a sea-bird like to thee,
Flits outward, where the whitening billows hide
What seemed of Life the one reality—
A mist whereon the morning bloom hath died,
Returning, ghost-like, to the restless sea.

JOHN BANISTER TABB.



I HAVE a gentil cook
Crowyt me day,
He doth me rysyn erly,
My matyins for to say.
I have a gentil cook
Comyn he is of gret,
His comb is of reed corel,
His tayil is of get.
I have a gentyl cook,
Comyn he is of kynde,
His comb is of red scorel,
His tayl is of inde;
His legges ben of asour,
So geintil & so smele,
His spores arn of sylver quyt
In to the wortewale;
His eyuyn are of crystal,
Lokyn al in aumbyr;
And euery nyȝt he perchit hym
In myn ladyis chaumbyr.

ANON.

THE TWA CORBIES

AS I was walking all alane
I heard twa corbies making a mane :
The tane unto the tither did say,
'Whar sall we gang and dine the day?'

'— In behint yon auld fail dyke
I wot there lies a new-slain knight ;
And naebody kens that he lies there
But his hawk, his hound, and his lady fair.

'His hound is to the hunting gane,
His hawk to fetch the wild-fowl hame,
His lady 's ta'en anither mate,
So we may mak our dinner sweet.

'Ye'll sit on his white hause-bane,
And I'll pike out his bonny blue e'en :
Wi' ae lock o' his gowden hair
We'll theek our nest when it grows bare.

'Mony a one for him maks mane,
But nane sall ken whar he is gane :
O'er his white banes, when they are bare,
The wind sall blaw for evermair.'

ANON.

A CHRISTMAS CAROL

IT chanced upon the merry merry Christmas eve,
I went sighing past the church across the moorland dreary—
'Oh! never sin and want and woe this earth will leave,
And the bells but mock the wailing round, they sing so cheery.
How long, O Lord! how long before Thou come again?
Still in cellar, and in garret, and on moorland dreary,
The orphans moan, and widows weep, and poor men toil in vain,
Till earth is sick of hope deferred, though Christmas bells be cheery.'

Then arose a joyous clamour from the wild-fowl on the mere,
Beneath the stars, across the snow, like clear bells ringing,
And a voice within cried—'Listen—Christmas carols even here
Though thou be dumb, yet o'er their work the stars and snows are singing.
Blind! I live, I love, I reign; and all the nations through,
With the thunder of my judgments even now are ringing.
Do thou fulfil thy work but as yon wild-fowl do,
Thou wilt heed no less the wailing, yet hear through it angels singing.'

CHARLES KINGSLEY.

I HAVE heard,
The cock, that is the trumpet to the morn,
Doth with his lofty and shrill-sounding throat
Awake the god of day; and at his warning,
Whether in sea or fire, in earth or air,
Th' extravagant and erring spirit hies
To his confine.

. . . . . .

Some say, that ever 'gainst that season comes
Wherein our Saviour's birth is celebrated,
The bird of dawning singeth all night long:
And then, they say, no spirit dare stir abroad;
The nights are wholesome; then no planets strike,
No fairy takes, nor witch hath power to charm;
So hallowed and so gracious is the time.

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE.

THE FALL OF THE SPARROW

ARE you dying, little Bird?
'Yea; the song so often heard,
And the gift of suffering,
Back to God again I bring.

'All in each, and each in all,
Counting in the Sparrow's fall,
By the power of sinless pain
(His and ours) He cleanseth stain.
Suffering, He deigned to die
Poor and innocent as I.'

JOHN BANISTER TABB.



IS the middle of night by the castle clock,
And owls have awakened the crowing cock,
Tu-whit !—Tu-whoo !
And hark, again ! the crowing cock,
How drowsily it crew.

SAMUEL TAYLOR COLERIDGE.



RISK chaunticleer his mattins had begun,
And broke the silence of the night,
And thrice he called aloud the tardy sun ;
And thrice he hailed the dawn's ambiguous light ;
Back to their graves the fear-begotten phantoms run.

CHRISTOPHER SMART.

SONG—THE OWL



HEN cats run home and light is come,
And dew is cold upon the ground,
And the far-off stream is dumb,
And the whirring sail goes round,
And the whirring sail goes round;
Alone and warming his five wits,
The white owl in the belfry sits.

When merry milkmaids click the latch,
And rarely smells the new mown hay,
And the cock hath sung beneath the thatch
Twice or thrice his roundelay,
Twice or thrice his roundelay;
Alone and warming his five wits,
The white owl in the belfry sits.

ALFRED TENNYSON.

I know him, February's thrush
And loud at eve he valentines

THE DARKLING THRUSH



LEANT upon a coppice gate
When frost was spectre-grey,
And Winter's dregs made desolate
The weakening eye of day.
The tangled bine-stems scored the sky
Like strings from broken lyres,
And all mankind that haunted nigh,
Had sought their household fires.

The land's sharp features seemed to be
The Century's corpse outleant,
His crypt the cloudy canopy
The wind his death-lament.
The ancient pulse of germ and birth
Was shrunken hard and dry,
And every spirit upon earth
Seemed fervourless as I.

At once a voice outburst among
The bleak twigs overhead,
In a full-hearted evensong
Of joy illimited;
An aged thrush, frail, gaunt, and small,
In blast-beruffled plume,
Had chosen thus to fling his soul
Upon the growing gloom.

So little cause for carollings
Of such ecstatic sound
Was written on terrestrial things
Afar or nigh around,
That I could think there trembled through
His happy good-night air
Some blessed hope, whereof he knew
And I was unaware.

THOMAS HARDY.

VALENTINE'S DAY



H! I wish I were a tiny browny bird from out the south,
Settled among the alder-holts, and twittering by the stream;
I would put my tiny tail down, and put up my tiny mouth,
And sing my tiny life away in one melodious dream.

I would sing about the blossoms, and the sunshine and the sky,
And the tiny wife I mean to have in such a cosy nest;
And if someone came and shot me dead, why then I could but die,
With my tiny life and tiny song just ended at their best.

CHARLES KINGSLEY.

EPITHALAMION

HAIL, Bishop Valentine! whose day is this;
All the air is thy diocese,
And all the chirping choristers
And other birds are thy parishioners:
Thou marriest every year
The lyric lark, and the grave whispering dove,
The sparrow that neglects his life for love,
The household bird with the red stomacher;
Thou makest the blackbird speed as soon
As doth the goldfinch or the halcyon;
The husband cock looks out and straight is sped,
And meets his wife, which brings her feather-bed.
This day more cheerfully than ever shine;
This day, which might inflame thyself, old Valentine.

JOHN DONNE.

IN pairing-time, we know, the bird
Kindles to its deepmost splendour,
And the tender
Voice is tenderest in its throat:
Were its love, for ever nigh it,
Never by it,
It might keep a vernal note,
The crocean and amethystine
In their pristine
Lustre linger on its coat.
Therefore must my song-bower lone be,
That my tone be
Fresh with dewy pain alway;
She, who scorns my dearest care ta'en,
An uncertain
Shadow of the sprite of May.

FRANCIS THOMPSON.

ROUNDEL

(With a Valentine)

NOW doth merry Spring
Make his bridal vow—
Love 's in every thing
Now.
Linnets on the bough,
Golden-throated, sing—
Ah! thou knowest how.

But Time's on the wing,
Quickly, Love, do thou
Take the heart I bring,
Now.

WILLIAM BOWRY.

LAST WEEK OF FEBRUARY

HARK to the merry birds, hark how they sing!
Although 'tis not yet spring
And keen the air;
Hale Winter, half resigning e'er he go,
Doth to his heiress shew
His kingdom fair.

In patient russet is his forest spread,
All bright with bramble red,
With beechen moss
And holly sheen: the oak silver and stark
Sunneth his aged bark
And wrinkled boss.

But neath the ruin of the withered brake
Primroses now awake
From nursing shades:
The crumpled carpet of the dry leaves brown
Avails not to keep down
The hyacinth blades.

The hazel hath put forth his tassels ruffed;
The willow's flossy tuft
Hath slipped him free:
The rose amid her ransacked orange hips
Braggeth the tender tips
Of bowers to be.

A black rook stirs the branches here and there,
Foraging to repair
His broken home:
And hark, on the ash boughs! Never thrush did sing
Louder in praise of spring,
When spring is come.

ROBERT BRIDGES.

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